

Staying in touch with beer, letters

Soldier reaches out to family at home

MNG
By Rob Schulze
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PLYMOUTH — Arabic beer cans. A homemade, signed unit flag. And many, many pictures. These are the things that U.S. Army Spc. Christopher Tripp of Plymouth is sending home from the Middle East.

Tripp, 31, is a National Guardsman from the 721st maintenance company at Otis Air Force Base on Cape Cod. He was called to active service in February for the 110th Maintenance Company from Fort Devens in Ayer. He then went to Kuwait before spending the past 2½ months in Talil, Iraq.

"He told me, 'Don't even look for it on a map because it's not there. It's just tents in the desert,'" said his wife, Christine, of Talil.

Christopher is a maintenance mechanic. When at home, he works full-time as a civilian as a mechanic at Otis and is a bouncer at Riptides restaurant in downtown Plymouth.

In Iraq, his job is more risky than fixing equipment on a base.

"He goes right out into the field and recovers vehicles," Christine said.

Once these vehicles are recovered and brought to Talil, Christopher and his company work to make them operable again.

And, of course, they are very careful while they do it.

"They're in what they call full battle rattle, locked and loaded and ready to go," Christine said.

While her husband is half a world away, Christine takes care of the couple's two young children and two elderly relatives.

"I'm not one of those crack-under-pressure military wives," she said, adding that although it's tough, the family has been doing OK in her husband's absence.

One of the things that does make it easier are the contacts she has with Christopher.

Since he's been in Iraq he can only call roughly once a week, and then perhaps only for as little as five minutes, but she does get letters from him, and souvenirs.

The beer cans are still in the mail, but she received a Muslim prayer rug from Kuwait and the signed flag — and many, many pictures.



Staff photo/Rob Schulze

Military standing — U.S. Army Specialist Christopher Tripp of Plymouth and Sgt. Gary Plunkett of the New Bedford area hold up Old Glory in Talil, Iraq, on Memorial Day.

Many of the pictures are of Christopher and some fellow soldiers posing with the flag on Memorial Day — quickly and just for the picture, since prominently displaying the flag is forbidden in Iraq.

There are also pictures of the tent city that is Talil, of a tent full of military weapons, of rows of Blackhawk helicopters, of Arabic graffiti on a bunker wall.

The letters, gifts and photos help Christine cope with his absence.

"When I don't hear from him, and I'm sitting and watching the news, is when it's very stressful," she said.

She is restricted in what she can send back to him, since things that might offend the Iraqis are expressly forbidden. That includes things like pork, the Bible and anything with alcohol — the Kuwaiti beer

cans were nonalcoholic brew.

She does send him what she can including food, letters and, of course, flea powder.

"There are fleas, and one in every 50 fleas carries a disease that can only be treated in Washington," she said.

Also legendary are the Iraqi spiders.

According to her husband, they are the size of a flattened baseball and can jump several feet. Their bite doesn't hurt, but it does insert eggs into your body — and the little spider babies crawl out when the eggs hatch.

"He hates spiders, too, so I'm sure he's losing it," Christine said.

Christopher has been in the military for 11 years, although this is his